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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALMATY 004144

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN (J. MUDGE)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: OPPOSITION FIGURE MURDERED AT HOME

REF: A. ALMATY 4074

[B](#). 04 ALMATY 2826

[C](#). 04 ALMATY 869

[D](#). 04 ALMATY 907

[E](#). ALMATY 4076

Classified By: Ambassador John Ordway, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#). (C) Summary: The murder on November 12 of former high-level GOK official, and more recently outspoken opposition figure, Zamanbek Nurkadilov has touched off a series of rumors and accusations among the Kazakhstani public and political elite. Shot three times at his residence, Nurkadilov had reportedly told several people that he was planning to reveal compromising information about President Nazarbayev before the December 4 presidential elections. The police have launched an energetic investigation, but have not yet publicly identified any suspects. There is no evidence that the murder was politically motivated. End summary.

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Facts of the Case  
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[2](#). (SBU) On November 12, outspoken opposition figure Zamanbek Nurkadilov was found dead in his home by his wife, well-known singer Makpal Zhunusova (Ref A). According to the family lawyer, he had been shot twice in the chest and once in the head. His own "Cobalt" revolver and a pillow with bullet holes in it were found near the body. President Nazarbayev issued a condolence statement and ordered the formation of a special operational investigative group from the Almaty police to investigate the death. In a November 15 statement, investigators confirmed that Nurkadilov had been shot once in the temple, believed to be the fatal wound, and twice in the body. The police are still reviewing physical, ballistic, and other forensic evidence, as well as witness statements. On November 13 the police announced that they had reviewed video footage from the 16 security cameras on Nurkadilov's property and determined that no strangers had entered that day. On November 15, investigators termed that analysis "preliminary" and announced that they were reviewing all of the footage in detail. They announced on November 17 that Nurkadilov's relatives described him as very nervous the night before and day of his death. The investigators have not publicly identified any suspects.

[3](#). (C) Nurkadilov was a longtime Nazarbayev ally who split with him in spring 2004 over the move of the Agency for Emergency Situations, which he then headed, from Almaty to Astana. After calling for Nazarbayev's resignation, Nurkadilov was sacked, and became an outspoken critic of the administration (Refs B-C). Following opposition journalist Askhat Sharipzhanov's death after being hit by a car in July 2004, Nurkadilov accused Nazarbayev and then-Presidential Administration head (and now Almaty City akim) Imangali Tasmagambetov of ordering the killing. Nurkadilov claimed the reason was to suppress information Sharipzhanov had obtained in interviews with Nurkadilov and opposition leader Sarsenbailuly (Ref D). In spring 2005, Nurkadilov announced that he had incriminating information about Nazarbayev that he had placed in a safe deposit box in Europe. Although he was on the Central Council of the "For a Just Kazakhstan" movement, Nurkadilov had not been a visible part of the ongoing presidential election campaign.

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Theories of the Crime  
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[4](#). (C) Family or business dispute: Several commentators and GOK officials have speculated that, because it appears no strangers entered the Nurkadilov family compound on November 12, he must have been killed by a family member or business associate. The police questioned his widow for four hours on November 16. Zhunusova later issued a statement saying that their relationship had been healthy. Independent journalist Sergey Duvanov, who claims to have known the couple well, told POEC chief that he did not believe Zhunusova was responsible. He added that Nurkadilov had excellent relationships with his two adult children from his first marriage. Duvanov also discounted rumors that Nurkadilov was killed over a business dispute, on the grounds that

Nurkadilov had made all his money while akim of Almaty (1997-2001) and had no ongoing business activities.

15. (C) GOK-ordered hit: Several political analysts, including Duvanov in a November 14 kub.kz article, have speculated that the authorities had Nurkadilov killed to prevent him from going public with compromising information about Nazarbayev in the run up to December 4 presidential

elections. Opposition journalist Yermurat Bapi announced on November 14 that Nurkadilov had told him in late October that he was getting ready to reveal a "new bomb," i.e. information about Nazarbayev. Duvanov told POEC chief that Nurkadilov had told him he planned to make the announcement on December 1 in Europe. The "For a Just Kazakhstan" movement issued a statement labeling the killing political without elaborating on this conclusion. The vigor with which the authorities have begun the investigation would appear to indicate they have nothing to hide. Presidential advisor Karim Masimov told the Ambassador that the GOK would do whatever it took to ensure a complete investigation, including calling in international experts if necessary.

16. (C) Opposition "provocation": Mazhilis member Mikhail Troshikhin appeared to blame the opposition when he said that "only destructive forces which want to explode and shake the situation in Kazakhstan, which want blood," would benefit from Nurkadilov's death. First daughter and Mazhilis member Dariga Nazarbayeva echoed Troshikhin's comments on November 15, saying that "this tragic death is handy above all for the opposition, not for the authorities." This theory has not gained much resonance, likely due to the fact that none of the opposition figures is known to have ever resorted to force. Duvanov also pointed out that the fact that the opposition did not take action to capitalize on the death politically, such as by organizing a protest during the funeral, as a sign that they were not behind it.

17. (C) Destabilization by a "third force": Several political analysts have commented publicly and privately that they see the murder as an attempt by someone in power to discredit Nazarbayev and destabilize the political situation. DCK activist Gulzhan Yergeliyeva stated publicly that the killing had been political, by someone seeking to "frame" Nazarbayev.

In a conversation with PolFSN on November 14, Nurbulat Masanov described Nurkadilov's death as "the first political assassination in the history of independent Kazakhstan" and said it marked the start of a fight for power between influential groups surrounding Nazarbayev. He opined that someone close to the president had ordered the hit in order to place Nazarbayev under attack. Duvanov told POEC chief that, despite what he had written, he personally subscribed to this theory. He thought that ruthless, wealthy people around the president -- possibly sons-in-law Rakhat Aliyev or Timur Kulibayev -- had started the struggle for power by discrediting Nazarbayev. Duvanov thought the person responsible could have been reacting to a perceived "detente" between the opposition and the authorities following Nazarbayev's October 24 statement that he would work with the opposition after the election if they behaved responsibly (Ref E). Duvanov added he was beginning to rethink his earlier belief that Sharipzhanov's death had been accidental.

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Comment  
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18. (C) We may never know the truth behind Nurkadilov's death. Nevertheless, it seems clear that neither President Nazarbayev himself nor the opposition stood to gain from an inconclusive scandal in the weeks before the election. The simplest explanation is the most likely: Nurkadilov was killed by someone in his family or close circle of friends. Despite this, the way the killing was carried out, the timing so close to presidential elections, and Nurkadilov's history of threatening to reveal the misdeeds of those in power have created a widespread public view that the murder was politically motivated. However, the fact that Nurkadilov's own pistol was the murder weapon and that he lived in a well-guarded residential compound surrounded by family members point to the former rather than the latter theory.

ORDWAY

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